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Fear of Death in *White Noise*

In *White Noise*, wrote by Don Delillo, the fear of death lurks everywhere. In the Gladney family, death lurks around every corner deep in the heart of all. Jack Gladney fears death but associates himself with death in many ways. He connects himself with Hitler and made many connections between his life and the life of Hitler. Jack fears when he will die, leaving his wife and family behind. He fears the sudden attack of death and doesn’t know how to cope with him. Jack finds evidence of death everywhere and in many little details. Although Jack fears death, he does find an escape haven. Jack uses his Hitler studies and connections to ward off his fear of death.

Jack fears when death will arrive to greet him. He kept wondering “who will die first?” (15) Death can be spontaneous and uncontrollable. Jack can’t tell whether he will die first or his wife Babette will die first. The question of who will die first were repeated many times throughout the novel and left unanswered. Jack and Babette had discussed the question of death in chapter 20 where Jack and Babette express their views on death. Jack wanted to die first for “I’ve gotten so used to her that I would feel miserably incomplete.” (100) To answer the question of who will die first, although Jack fears death, Jack wants to be the one to die first for he does not want to suffer the effect of the death of his wife. Babette wants to die before Jack because “she would feel unbearably lonely and sad without me.” (100) Both Jack and Babette fear death but wants to die before their spouse since it would spare them of the loneliness and pain of grieving for their other half.

Although Jack fears death, he does find his own haven to escape his fear. Jack makes his living studying and giving lectures on Hitler, a figure closely tied with death. As Jack studies more into Hitler and changing his identity to match with Hitler, Jack hides behind a mask and reinvented himself as a figure tied with Hitler and death. Jack hid himself behind Hitler and “Hitler gave me something to grow into and develop toward.” (17) Jack believes studying about Hitler and being connected to Hitler gives his a stronger defense again death. Where Jack is fearful of his surroundings and death, he was comfortable with death in classrooms and when giving lectures. After Jack gave a lecture on Hitler to a huge crowd, he said “death was strictly a professional matter here. I was comfortable with it, I was on top of it.” (74) When Jack is in a crowd, he does not fear death. As a part of Jack’s lecture, Jack said that “crowds came to form a shield against their own dying. To become a crowd is to keep out death.” (73) For Jack, when one is a part of a crowd and in harmony, death cannot come between them and together, they can fight off death. When Jack gives lectures on Hitler, there are always crowds and makes Jack feel safe from death.

Question: Since Hitler is so closely associated with death, how come Jack does not feel threatened since he associates himself with death by studying about a figure that represents death?